

Statement of the LWVWI in opposition to the Advisory Referendum which will appear on the April 4 ballot

The Advisory Referendum on the April 4 ballot (SJ4) will read: Shall able-bodied, childless adults be required to look for work in order to receive taxpayer-funded welfare benefits?

League Position

The League of Women Voters supports the right of an informed electorate to participate in free and fair elections to provide direction to the government and its policies. To achieve this requires accurate and complete information about the policies, goals, and purposes of the proposals placed before the electorate. This referendum asks voters to make a choice about public policies without providing information about the programs affected, or even the purpose of the proposed changes. It is unfortunate that such indeterminate language can be presented to the electorate disguised as a referendum.

The LWVWI opposes this advisory referendum on the grounds that the wording is devoid of information and so vague that it lacks meaning. Voters cannot possibly know what public policy will or could be affected. A voter could not determine what impact this advisory referendum would have on the workforce. Voters will be unable to make an informed or reasonable decision when casting their vote on this vague advisory referendum.

The results of this referendum will have no impact on the law or compel any action. However, legislative leadership has stated that the results of this advisory referendum will be used to advise future legislation.

Examples of vague language:

To what taxpayer-funded welfare benefits is the referendum referring? Providing no clarity, it is possible that this advisory referendum could apply to any number of public benefit programs.

What is the definition of able-bodied? Are there exemptions (for example, for a person who is able-bodied but who has a mental health condition)?

If, for instance, the taxpayer-funded welfare benefit referenced in the referendum is BadgerCare, the LWVWI would oppose the referendum as written. Given the term

“childless adult” in the referendum question, a voter may surmise that BadgerCare is the “welfare” benefit being targeted.

BadgerCare is health insurance for childless individuals who live at or below 100% of poverty (\$14,580 or less annual income). Circumstances of people enrolled in BadgerCare could include:

- Individuals working part-time at minimum wage not able to afford health insurance nor receiving it from their employer.
- Family caregivers of persons attending school. People who have applied for Social Security Disability and are awaiting a decision or people who have a disability but have been denied Social Security Disability.
- Individuals who are homeless.
- People with acute or chronic health conditions.
- Individuals with mental health or behavioral conditions such as mental illness, alcohol issues, and or drug dependencies.

Due to these conditions, getting hired and/or holding onto a job can be very challenging.

The failure to define “able-bodied” raises the question of whether there would be exemptions for individuals as described above. Uninsured individuals with mental health and behavioral issues have a very difficult time accessing needed treatment without insurance. Uninsured individuals with acute and chronic health conditions who seek care at emergency rooms raise the cost of health care for all Wisconsinites.

The stated statutory purpose of Medicaid is to enable states to furnish medical assistance to individuals whose incomes and resources are insufficient to meet the costs of necessary medical care. Medicaid is a federal and state-funded health care program, not an employment program. The Biden Administration has already informed Wisconsin that it cannot implement work verification requirements as a condition of Medicaid eligibility.